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PELTING KARAKUL LAMBS

By

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Karakul sheep produce lambskins that are known to the fur trade as "Persian Lamb". The method of removing and handling these lambskins is an important consideration in preserving the natural qualities of the raw pelt. Careless slaughtering and faulty preparation may affect the general appearance of the pelt to such an extent that the fur qualities are shown to disadvantage. When this occurs, the commercial value of the raw lambskins may be materially reduced.

Time of Slaughter

At the Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland, experiments have indicated that on the average Karakul lambs to be pelted should be killed within 24 hours after birth. Early pelting is essential because the curls open rapidly after a few days and the value of the pelt depreciates accordingly. The best time for pelting each lamb will depend largely on the type of curl and the pattern

of its fur. A general practice of pelting all lambs within the first four days after birth is usually satisfactory.

### Killing the Lamb

To kill the lamb, a string is looped around the hind legs and the lamb suspended against a woven wire fence, or other object of moderate height with the head hanging downward a few inches from the ground. This arrangement helps to hold the lamb in a steady position during the killing operation and also will keep much of the blood outside the barn or place of actual pelting. The head of the lamb is grasped in one hand and pulled well backwards. While in this position a sharp-pointed knife is inserted through the neck close to the neck bone and cutting out at right angles to the neck, the main arteries and veins are severed, allowing the lamb to bleed freely and the blood to drain away from the fur. Openings are cut between the leg bone and the tendons in each hind leg and a gambrel is inserted for holding the legs apart. The lamb is then suspended by the hind legs from a beam or other support about 6 1/2 feet from the ground or at a convenient height for skinning.

### Removing the Lambskin

The skin is removed from the lamb immediately after killing. This is important because the skin comes off more easily while the blood-heat is still in the carcass. It is also necessary to get a well-shaped skin that will save as much of the leather as possible which can only be done by properly cutting the skin (figure 1). The

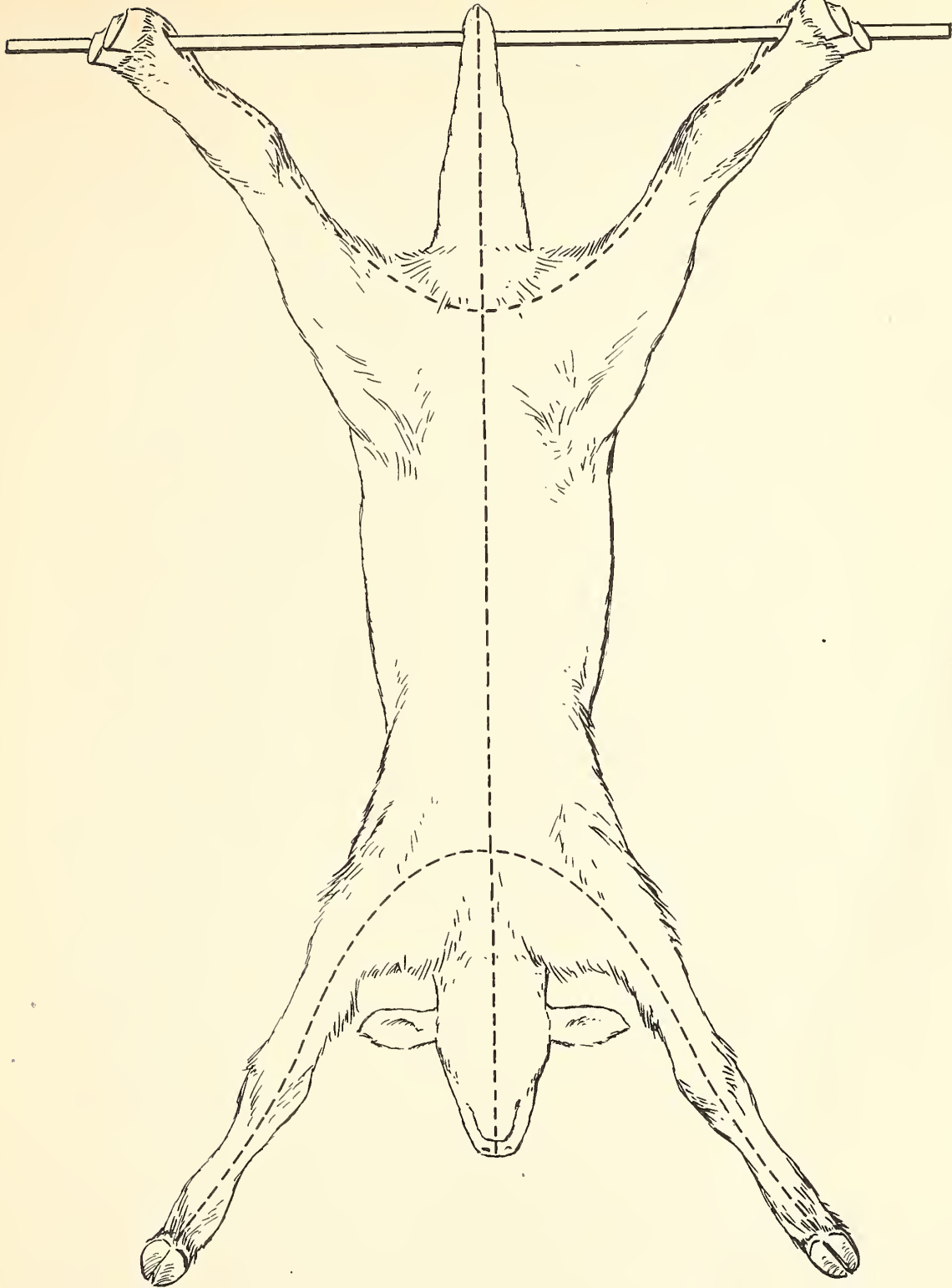


Figure 1. Lamb Suspended by Hind Legs With Dotted Lines Showing How The Skin Should Be Opened Up.



opening-up of the skin is started at the end of the tail and continues down its middle to the anus and in a straight line along the center of the belly, chest, and gullet to the lower lip. The skin on the hind legs is opened from the pastern joints down to a point just below the udder or scrotum and the skin on the front legs is opened from the pastern joints up the inside of the legs to the center of the chest. Much care is used to avoid making unnecessary cuts in the pelt that might decrease its fur value. The skin is then "thumbed" or "fisted off," using the knife only as needed to cut the skin or adhering fat away from the carcass. All head and tail parts of the pelt are saved as completely as possible. After removing the pelt, a cut is made in it from the corners of the eye holes to the corners of the mouth to allow the skin to lie flatly on the drying frame. In the process of removing all the fur that is possible from the lamb, some operators may cut the skin in such a manner that the scrotum, ears, and lips remain attached to the rest of the pelt. If this is done, the parts should be trimmed off afterwards as they have no value and tend to slow the drying process.

#### Washing Pelts

Freshly removed lambskins may be washed before they are placed on the drying frames. Experiments at Beltsville have shown that washing raw Karakul pelts with warm water displays their qualities much more clearly and advantageously than simply drying them as they are taken from the lamb. Washing removes materials such as manure and foetal fluids that harden and cling to the fur and make accurate evaluation of the pelt difficult.



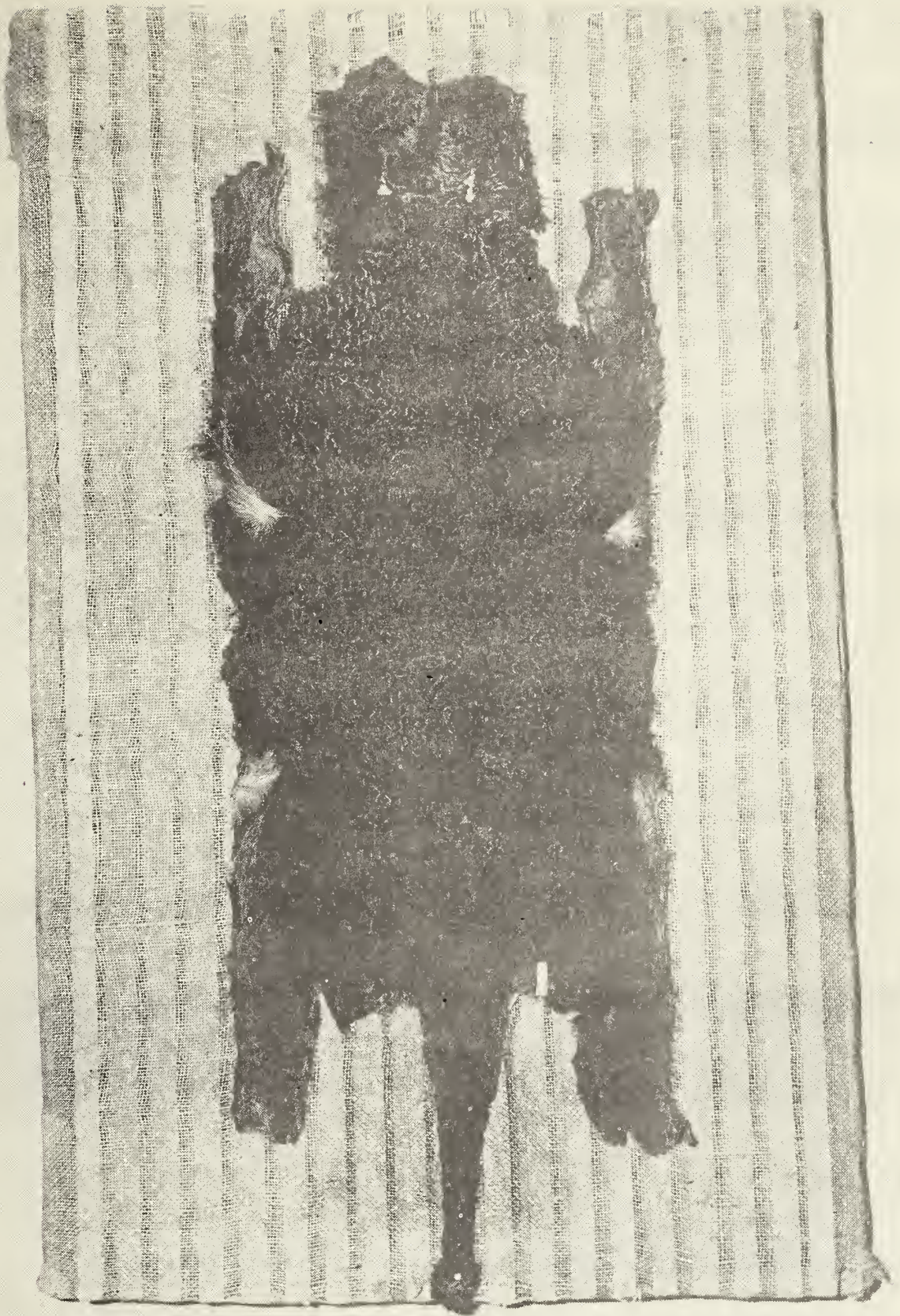


Figure 2. Raw Persian Lambskin In Proper Position For Drying On Burlap Covered Frame of Wood Slats.



### Drying the Pelts

The lambskins are dried by spreading each one out flat without tacking, skin side down, on a burlap-covered frame (figure 2). Each frame is 26 x 40 inches and made with wood slats  $3/4$  inch wide, nailed about  $1/2$  inch apart, on which the burlap is tightly stretched and tacked.

The pelt is spread out to its fullest extent, but not stretched. The forelegs are placed forward, parallel with the neck, and the hind legs are placed backward, parallel with the tail. The belly skin is slightly stretched so that it forms almost a straight line with the outer edge of the skin of the legs. In this way a rectangular form is given to the pelt when dry which helps in packing and is much desired by the fur trade. Thompson (1) and Rose and Louw (2) describe the use of a similar method of drying Karakul lambskins produced in South Africa. At Beltsville, only one pelt is placed on a drying frame and the frames are stacked one on top of another. They are constructed with the ends extended vertically so that when stacked there is a two or three inch space between frames to allow air circulation (figure 3). The skins dry satisfactorily in about 10 days in a room that is dry and moderately cool. The pelts are not treated in any way before or during the drying period.

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1. Thompson, A. D., Karakul Sheep: Government Flock and the Industry in South West Africa. Windhoek, (South West Africa Agricultural Branch, Memoir No. 1, 125 pp. illus, 1938).
  - 2; Rose, P. D., and Louw, D. J., Karakul Lamb Pelts. Grootfontein College of Agriculture, Middleburg, Cape, Union of South Africa. Reprint No. 81. Reprint from Farming in South Africa, November, 1945.



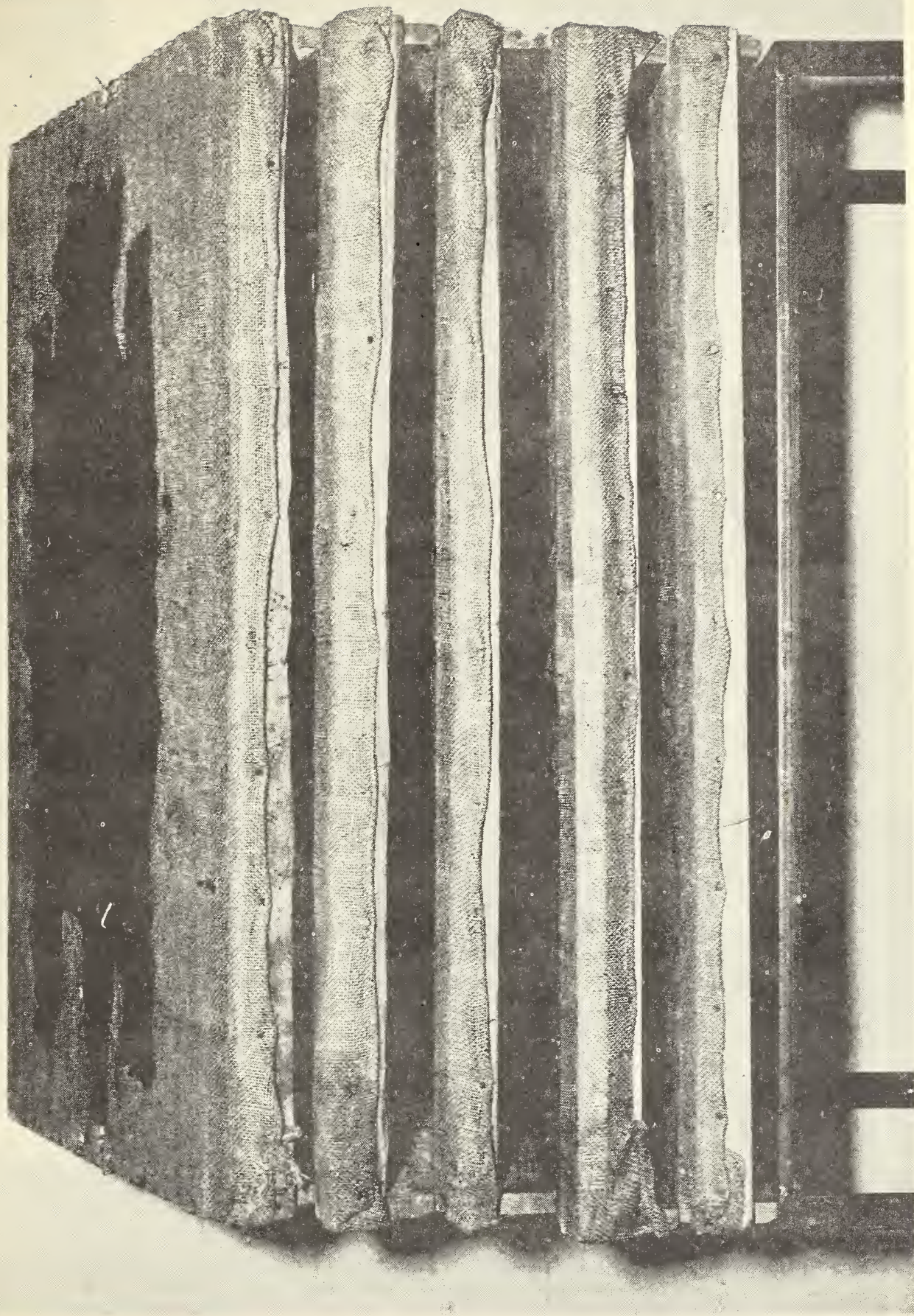


Figure 3. Drying Frames Stacked So As To Allow Free Circulation Of Air Between Pelts.



### Storage

When dry, the pelts are removed from the frames and stored in a cool dry place until they can be shipped to market or to fur processors for dressing and dying. If adequate refrigeration space for storing the raw pelts is unavailable, it is advisable to take other means of precaution against damage by insects, especially moths. This is very important if the lambskins are to be stored for a considerable length of time. At Beltsville, an air-tight box sufficiently large to hold the pelts in flat position has been found satisfactory. Placing a generous supply of paradichlorobenzene crystals in the box and sealing all cracks tightly with paper tape will give good protection for several weeks or months. However, occasional inspection of the lambskins and a renewal of the supply of paradichlorobenzene gives added assurance that the fur is properly protected.

### Shipping

In preparing the raw lambskins for shipment to the fur market, they are packed in a box large enough to allow the skins to be laid flat without folding. They are laid fur to fur, and skin to skin. For convenience in handling or to keep certain pelts identified in separate lots, they may be tied into small bundles. Fifteen to twenty pelts usually will make a bundle easy to handle. In tying the bundles, twine is placed around the necks, tails, front and hind legs, and the bodies of the pelts. The box is then securely tied or sealed for shipment.

Selling Persian Lambskins

Raw lambskins may be sold directly to fur merchants or raw-fur receiving houses specializing in this commodity, or they may be sent to the auction companies for sale on a commission basis. More specific information on this subject may be obtained from the Executive Director, American Fur Merchants Association, 393 Seventh Avenue, and the New York Auction Co., Inc., 226 West 26th Street, both New York 1, New York. The Department is not in a position to list all agencies engaged in merchandising furs and no discrimination is intended in mentioning only the above.

